

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 1960
By: Price
State Affairs
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

It has been noted that it is becoming increasingly difficult in the growing e-commerce economy to conduct various forms of business transactions without Internet connectivity. Concerns have been raised that lack of proper broadband connectivity in rural areas of Texas has left many residents at a disadvantage compared to other areas of the state and at risk of being left behind. To help close this digital divide, C.S.H.B. 1960 seeks to create a broadband development council within the governor's office.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 1960 amends the Government Code to create the 17-member governor's broadband development council. The bill sets out provisions relating to the council's composition, member terms and vacancies, the designation of a presiding officer, council meetings, and administrative support for the council. The bill sets out the following duties for the council:

- researching the progress of broadband in unserved areas, defined by the bill as a census block without access to broadband capable of providing certain minimum download and upload speeds;
- identifying barriers to residential and commercial broadband development in unserved areas;
- studying technology-neutral solutions to overcome those barriers; and
- analyzing specified potential benefits of statewide broadband access.

The bill authorizes the council to research another matter related to broadband only if a majority of the council approves researching the matter and authorizes the council, for the purposes of performing its duties, to consult with a representative of an institution of higher education who has published scholarly research on broadband.

C.S.H.B. 1960 requires the council to prepare and deliver a report in electronic format of its findings and recommendations to the governor, the lieutenant governor, and each member of the legislature not later than November 1 of each year with the first report due in 2020. The bill's provisions expire September 1, 2029.

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the bill does not receive the necessary vote, September 1, 2019.

COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL AND SUBSTITUTE

While C.S.H.B. 1960 may differ from the original in minor or nonsubstantive ways, the following summarizes the substantial differences between the introduced and committee substitute versions of the bill.

The substitute renames the council, increases its membership from 15 members to 17 members, and revises its composition by including one representative of the health information technology industry, one representative of a school district, and one representative from a library association.

The substitute revises the council's duties, in part, to focus the work of the council on unserved areas of the state, as defined by the bill.